The Reformed Journal

olume 5 — No. 9 A Periodical of Reformed Comment and Opinion October, 1955

S.F.T.S LIBRARY

Reformed Faith and Symmetrism

by LEONARD VERDUIN

ACCORDING to the Belgic Confession our God may be known both from His works and from His words. That Confession warns against abuses in connection with either of these. It is an old truism that if both of these self-disclosures of God are read correctly they will be found to tell the same story.

From His works as well as from His words it appears that our God is not as fond of symmetry as one might have expected Him to be. In fact His works and His words show that He has a dislike for perfect symmetry: and, at some very significant points.

Perhaps the word "symmetrism" needs explanation before we go on. It may be said to mean "after the same measurements." Symmetrism is the condition that we encounter wherever the component and complementary parts of a thing are exact repetitions of each other. Take this illustration. Here is a duplex dwelling. It consists of two halves that are identical: both have a kitchen, both have the same number of sleeping rooms, both open on the street. The only difference is that one is right and the other is left. The two apartments may be said to stand in symmetric relationship.

The word "asymmetrism," which we shall also have occasion to use, intends to convey the idea of "no-symmetrism." It stands for the condition where the component parts do indeed belong together, but do not stand in a symmetric relationship to each other.

To go on then, we have contended that God's works and God's words reveal that He is a God who has no penchant for symmetrism. He has willed to place component parts in an asymmetric relation to each other.

May we submit an example? When God made Adam and Eve He made them to complement each other, but not in a pattern of symmetrism. He did not make Adam on this side of the hill and Eve on yonder side, with the intention that the two should meet at the brow of the hill: He made Adam, and in a different way, and afterward He made Eve. It is said that Adam was made of the substance of the earth; but Eve was made of the substance of Adam. Keenly aware of the manifest asymmetrism that obtains at this point, the inspired Apostle informs us that "the man is not of the woman but the woman of the man."

In line with this asymmetric relationship between our first parents God made Adam, not Eve, to be the head of the Covenant of Works, so that it may be said that Original Sin is a paternal and not a maternal heirloom.

* * *

THIS asymmetrical relationship between the sexes is, as might have been anticipated, solidly endorsed by known biological facts. The process of reproduction manifests asymmetrism very clearly. The parts played by ovum and spermatozoon are indeed complementary parts, but not in any symmetric fashion. The latter seeks out the former, and not vice versa: the former is penetrated by the latter, and not the other way around. This is manifestly an asymmetric situation.

Because of this situation men have long since, and by a wholly defensible insight, expected the prospective husband to court and the prospective wife to be courted. In all societies men have had an aversion, perhaps an intuitive aversion, to a mixing of the roles in the matter, that is, with a courtship practice smacking of symmetrism. (The fact that among a few tribes it is the woman and not the man that takes the initiative in the preliminaries to marriage, does not militate against our thesis; in fact, it endorses it. Such tribes are just as aware as any others

IN THIS ISSUE

Reformed Faith and Symmetrism ..... *Leonard Verduin* 1
Our Dilemma in Communication ..... *John H. Kromminga* 3
The Dutch Schools and Ours ..... *Peter Oppewal* 7
Two Orders of Excellence ..... *Robert Otten* 10
"They Might Start Reading" ..... *J. K. Van Baalen* 11
Christian Education: The Past ..... *Wm. T. Radius* 13
What Are "Vacant" Churches? ..... *Harold Petroelje* 15

Reformed Faith and Symmetrism — Continued

are of asymmetrism. The only difference is that they have reversed the pattern, perhaps consciously).

How deep-seated this principle of asymmetrism is in the relationship of the sexes may be known moreover from certain other wellknown facts in the mechanics of reproduction. We know that the female parent produces so-called X-chromosomes, whereas the male parent produces not only X-chromosomes but also Y-chromosomes. When an X-chromosome of the father unites with an X-chromosome of the mother female offspring results: but when a Y-chromosome of the father unites with an X-chromosome of the mother the offspring is male. Female offspring results from X plus X; male offspring results from X plus Y; there are no Y plus Y offspring. For this reason it is wholly reasonable that offspring by parthenogenesis (the development of new individuals from females, without the benefit of fertilization by the male, which occurs especially in certain insects, crustaceans, and worms) is invariably female.

Even in situations where God has willed pairs of identical organs, as in the case of two eyes, two hands, etc. even these do not usually stand in symmetric relationship to each other; men are born either right-handed or left-handed. Ambidextrous people are made not born, in all probability. And even in instances of organs that occur in pairs these are frequently not in a position of perfect symmetry in relation to each other.

* * *

ALL this adds up to a situation of very evident asymmetrism.

Turning now to God's self-disclosure in the Book we find, as we had anticipated, the same situation.

Take for example, the matter of Good and Evil. It is one of the first tasks the Bible sets for itself to make it plain to us that Good and Evil do not stand in a symmetric relationship to each other. Good is primeval; Evil is a superimposed accident. For this reason it is pious to say of the Good, wherever it shows itself: "All of Thee, O God"; but it is blasphemous to say of the Evil; "All of Thee, O God."

The Bible makes it very plain that also in the angelic world (out of which Evil sidled into our world) Good and Evil stand in an asymmetric relationship to one another. God created only good angels; He did not create any devils. The latter are good angels gone bad. Gabriel was always in his present modality; Satan not so.

This asymmetric relationship between Good and Evil has complicated things for us. It has given rise in Reformed theology to a set of terms that would have hardly been necessary in a symmetric system. It has made necessary such terms as the "decretive" will of God over against the "preceptive" will (sometimes called the "will of decree" and the "will of command"; or, the "hidden" will and the "revealed" will. There are still other pairs of terms for these concepts.) The good deeds of men are embraced by the preceptive will as well as by the decretive will; not so the evil deeds.

When speaking of the decretive will of God typically Reformed writers have always hesitated to tie the sin, or the sins, of men to that decretive will with the same composure that they evince when they tie the good deeds of men to that decretive will. This has led them (and this too is an essential and integral feature of the Reformed idiom) to say that as to the decretive will God has willed sin "in a way." To include the evil of men in the preceptive will of God is to commit blasphemy: but to include the evil of men in the decretive will without such reservation as is attempted in the expression "in a sense" is to err in a not dissimilar way. Unless a man is prepared to utter the wholly offensive assertion that God willed the good "in a sense" he is driven to accept asymmetry as the proper term for setting forth the relationship of good and evil. God willed the good; He willed the evil also, but, "in a sense." Not to have this modifying phrase ready to hand at all times as one makes bold to talk about these things, is to reveal a penchant for symmetrism that must not be tolerated. Consistent symmetrism pulls God's truth out of shape; and this is always bad.

* * *

AT yet another point in the Reformed system, a point quite closely related to the former, asymmetrism appears, namely, in the doctrine of the "double predestination."

Election and reprobation (or whatever term is devised to designate "the other half of the picture" — it speaks volumes that no single term for the negative side of predestination has been able to get itself generally accepted) are not related to each other as the two halves of a duplex are. They stand in an asymmetric relationship to each other.

This is evident from the nomenclature. Opposite the word "election" there is no symmetric counterpart in common use. Its correlative is called "preterition," "leaving in sin," "rejection," "reprobation." But none of these is the symmetric opposite of election. If we were permitted to think in terms of symmetry we would have to put "election to death" over against "election to life" — but that is terminology too contrasty for Reformed thought. It is a habit of long standing in the Reformed tradition to treat of this stupendous matter along the lines of asymmetrism.

The Belgic Confession, for example, tells us that "all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin . . . God did then manifest Himself such as He is; that is to say, merciful and just; merciful, since He de-

The REFORMED JOURNAL

VOLUME V NO. 9
OCTOBER, 1955

A Periodical of Reformed Comment and Opinion

EDITORIAL BOARD
DR. HARRY R. BOER, Nigeria, West Africa
DR. JAMES DAANE, Los Angeles, Calif.
DR. GEORGE STOB, Passaic, New Jersey
DR. HENRY STOB, Grand Rapids, Mich.
DR. HENRY ZYLSTRA, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Published each month by the
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Subscription price: $2.00 per year
Entered as Second Class Matter at the Postoffice at Grand Rapids, Mich.
Address all subscriptions and communications to:
THE REFORMED JOURNAL
255 Jefferson Avenue, S. E.
Grand Rapids 3, Mich.

livers and preserves from this perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness has elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without respect to their works, just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves" (Art. XVI). This is a beautiful statement, and a true one. But it is a classic of asymmetrism. First of all, because *merciful* and *just* are not symmetric opposites. Then too "to elect" some and "to leave" others is to do two things that are not the symmetrical opposites of each other; if they were one we would be able to say "God elected some to life and passed the others by," and say, with equal propriety "God elected some to eternal death and passed the others by." The collision that occurs here is not a head-on collusion; it takes place obliquely.

Similarly the Heidelberg Catechism. It speaks clearly of "a church chosen to everlasting life" (L.D. 21); but it leaves the idea of another company "chosen to everlasting death" unmentioned. It leaves the matter of reprobation to be inferred. This is good theology; but it is not symmetric theology.

And the Canons of Dordt, *even* the Canons of Dordt, avoid carefully the language of symmetrism. They speak enthusiastically of election; but they are content to say of the rest "He leaves the non-elect . . . to their wickedness and obduracy" (I, 6). They declare that "God passes them by (I, 15). They warn us that it is "blasphemy" to implicate God in the evil of men as he is implicated in the good of men (I, 16). They shy away from such language as "God willed sin." These Canons were drawn up by men whose training was long on courses in logic; this fact makes their language of asymmetrism all the more significant. We may say that they loved symmetry; but not to the extent of entertaining the blasphemous for the sake of symmetry.

He whose soul is so angular that he cannot live in the presence of asymmetrism may have his book — but it will not be The Book. The Koran should be much more to his liking; for it speaks the language of perfect symmetry, with its Almighty saying "This one to eternal life and what care I? and this one to eternal death and what matters it to me?"

* * *

One of the sinister results of symmetrism consistently embraced is that it robs us of a genuine Gospel method. The idea of a well-meant offer must invariably atrophy in its presence. If God "means it" when He confronts the sinner with the possibility of salvation in the same way, symmetrically, in which He "means it" when He threatens the elect, then the practical upshot as well as the theological implication is that He does not "mean it." And the next thing is to put one's tongue in his cheek when he reads the Lord's assertion, made under oath at that, that He takes no delight in the death (destruction) of the sinner. Let us not take this lightly. The Evangel as a *bona fide* invitation to the good things that are in Christ cannot survive the blighting influence of symmetrism. It has not survived in the case of ancient symmetrists; it will not survive in the case of contemporary symmetrists.

Our Dilemma in Communication

by JOHN H. KROMMINGA

Readers of the *Journal* will be well aware of a complaint that has arisen in the bosom of the church. Henry Zylstra, commenting on the absence of notice given to the Christian Reformed Church in McNeill's *History and Character of Calvinism*, bemoans the lack of a greater impact on the society in which we live. Harry Boer eloquently bewails the fact that we have no Fiorella Tonelli or Katy O'Brien in our denomination. Other writers in other church papers have expressed themselves along the same lines.

They are voicing anew a theme heard before. At least twenty years ago, in connection with the "ministerial oversupply" at the time of the great depression, we began to talk about more contact with the American world. The questions were put again a decade ago, in connection with the contacts some of our men had made in the service and in the light of the success of the Back to God Hour. But now the questions are less exploratory and hortatory, and begin to take on a querulous note. "When, if ever, will we begin to do something about communicating with our neighbors?"

It is quite proper that we examine and reprove ourselves on this score. Unquestionably there has been some lethargy, some defensiveness, some selfishness in our attitude. There is some reason to berate ourselves, and I would not wish to be thought of as one who denies this, or begins to make excuses.

But it is also well to recognize that there is a first-class problem involved in communicating with our American neighbors. Let us make clear that we have no intention of providing or suggesting alibis. But no warrior worthy of the name attacks an enemy without an estimate of his strength. The purpose of this article is therefore to seek to make some progress toward defining the problem.

* * *

Our dilemma is best seen against the background of the consideration of our environment. There are some characteristics in which we differ markedly from our environment. There are others in which we clearly show its impact. The differences, as suggested in two previous *Journal* articles, involve our greater creedal consciousness and sense of historic continuity of the Church, our refusal to adopt the revival as a standard technique, and our continuing interest in theological discussion. The similarities include a measure of voluntaryism and a tendency to make our own peculiar combination of scholastic orthodoxy and pietism.

We might proceed to delineate the differences and similarities at much greater length. We prefer, however,

Our Dilemma in Communication — Continued

merely to say in general that many of the differences exist because we have not yet fully faced the problems, and many of the similarities begin to make their appearance because those problems are beginning to be faced. We confront many of the same problems which earlier Americans faced. In a sense we may be said to be at the cross-roads, because the American situation has caught up with us. The question now is whether the problems have changed enough, or whether we have learned enough from the experience of others, to provide an answer better than that which they were able to give.

I take it that we must all be agreed that a blindly defensive attitude cannot be satisfactory. Even if we had no sense of mission to our neighbors, the very thing which we seek to preserve atrophies while we mummify it. But we find ourselves confronted with a dilemma, which we will now seek to delineate by stating it in various ways.

1) Our dilemma is Americanization itself. This process is, on the one hand, the means by which we will graduate into a genuine effectiveness; on the other hand, it threatens us with dangers which we wish to avoid at all costs. This would seem to dictate a selective Americanization; but neither we nor many before us have demonstrated an ability to choose by what means, in what manner, or at what rate they are to be Americanized.

2) If we do not become like our neighbors, we cannot expect them to listen to us. But if we do become like them, we shall have nothing to say to them.

3) There are some elements in Reformed theology which are distinctive. Those distinctive elements are anathema to the American religious spirit. Yet we feel that the very heart of the truth is closely bound up with them.

4) We have the responsibility of giving to the American world precisely what that world does not want. In some degree this is true of the whole concept of Scriptural authority in religious matters. It applies even more directly to a doctrinal emphasis in general. But it is particularly acute with respect to the whole complex of doctrines involved in election and the sovereignty of God.

5) In communicating with our environment, we gravely mistrust the revival, that means which has been most commonly adopted by the American churches. Our mistrust grows as we observe in its long-range effects. Yet there is nothing which has worked better than this to bring success to American religion.

6) It is a commonplace that the churches with the most flexible organization and the most Arminian theology made by far the greatest impact on the frontier. Yet we believe that our presbyterian form of government and our emphasis on the sovereignty of God are two essential parts of the very benefit which we have to offer our fellow Americans. How then shall we gain them on the basis of that which seems to attract them least? Merely contending that the Reformed theology provides the best incentive and basis for missions will not save the day. We shall have to find and use, quickly, the means to bridge this gap.

7) The American tendency, among both liberals and fundamentalists, has been to emphasize super-denominational cooperation without theological agreement or even prior theological discussion. We believe that this very approach is wrong; there must be at least a basic theological agreement first, and cooperation ought to follow upon this. But how shall we overcome the handicap of our "oddity" in this respect?

Our attempts to define our dilemma may perhaps be summed up in this; in becoming American with safety and profit, we shall have to go directly against many general American tendencies. How well equipped are we to meet this problem? And from what sources may we expect help?

* * *

As if our obstacles were not great enough, there is an internal weakness also which besets us and makes our task all the more difficult. It consists in our defensive attitude toward the environment in which we live. That there is such an attitude can hardly be much of a surprise to any of us. But we are not all accustomed to speak of a defensive attitude as a handicap, and perhaps some careful distinctions are called for here. I should say that our defensiveness lies not so much in our organizations and institutions as in what we have done with them. Our system of Christian education, for example, might be either a defensive or an aggressive agency. But we have generally made it quite exclusively the former. We have distinctly repudiated the suggestion that the Christian schools might in any way be mission agencies. And beyond that, we have spent little time in the Christian schools seeking to inculcate a mission interest in the covenant children themselves.

Again, there are indications in our past that we have used the Formula of Subscription as a refuge in which to hide from any danger which threatens our system — even when that danger is the suggestion that we re-examine some doctrine in the light of Scripture.

There is another illustration, hard to document, but very significant. We have shown a tendency to condemn various phenomena of our modern existence before we have made any substantial investigation of them; for example, the World Council of Churches and the Revised Standard Version. I do not say that there is nothing to criticize about these things, or even that our final judgment should not be negative; but it seems there is an attitude which makes their condemnation something of a foregone conclusion.

Our defensive attitude threatens to become our master instead of our servant at yet another point. We train and engage men to be leaders of the denomination, to give direction to the advance of our people. But then we penalize them when they exercise that leadership to the extent of saying something which conflicts with the ideas we have long held. We call them leaders, but we tend to make them followers of an uninformed public opinion.

None of these things is formalized in the rules and regulations of any of our institutions. But, together with our lack of welcome to "outsiders" at our church services and our failure to write things which are noted outside of our closed circle, these are things which we have done with our system. This reflects a situation in which the structural elements of our system are largely borrowed from a society which is more secure and self-confident than ours, *but used under the impression that our environment is overwhelmingly hostile.*

Defensiveness, of course, is not wholly evil. Surely there was a period in the past in which it served us very

well. And even that past justification is not the whole of the story. The truth is something to be preserved; covenant children must be protected; Zion must be defended.

But we may not forget that this defense can defeat its own purpose if it is not wisely conducted. The form which the defense may legitimately take is not the same in every generation. If the old defenses are perpetuated in too rigid a form, we threaten to pervert the very thing which we are getting out to defend; the living, vibrant Gospel.

What are we defending? If our defense is a selfish activity in which *we* are the final criteria, we will find ourselves fighting to preserve many things which are not essential to the Gospel and which eventually get in its way. When this becomes the case, we need not expect the blessing of God upon our efforts. But the picture changes if what we defend is that Gospel itself. Then the duty can no more be understood in terms of keeping the outsiders out. Then it becomes much rather a matter of getting the outsiders in. When our defensive strategy is directed to this far more worthy aim, then it is put in its proper place; for it is evident from the nature and history of the Gospel that it does not need defense as much as it needs propagation; its propagation is its defense, and any defense which obstructs its propagation is in the last analysis its own worst enemy. Our question ought not to be, "Against what dangers shall we defend ourselves?" Rather, it should be, "Over what obstacles shall we advance with the Gospel?"

THE second great difficulty in our position, next to our hyper-defensive attitude, is that we face this problem, in a sense, all alone. Various helps on which we are accustomed to lean are of little help to us here. We are accustomed to look to the Protestant Reformation for help. But there are serious limitations to the help which we may now expect from it. We are not now speaking of the return of part of Christianized Europe to a faith which it never wholly rejected. We are speaking of a complex task which includes the address to pagans who have never heard the Gospel, apostates who have rejected the Gospel, and myriads of churches which have in various degrees perverted or neglected the Gospel. Our task is not even identical with the medieval Christianization of Europe; for that was an initial presentation of the Gospel message. But we must reintroduce something which has been passed by. We face the stupendous problems of a *post*-Christian theology, morality, and society.

Beyond all this, the Reformation creeds themselves are woefully weak on the whole subject of missions. We are growing in our awareness of that fact, but it confronts us with the idea of developing something for ourselves, and we are not accustomed to doing that. In general, it would be a serious error to adopt some specific answers which the Reformation gave to the specific problems of its age, precisely because those problems are not ours. Much rather, we will find help in the Reformation only if we set ourselves to follow it in its incessant labor with and wholesome reliance upon Scripture. In that sense its guidance can profit us indeed.

We can be briefer with the rest of the description of our loneliness. We have relied also on the Netherlands for help in many a problem in the past, and have received much light from her. But this is our problem, and the American environment is one conundrum which our brethren in the Netherlands do not share with us. We cannot expect them to solve this problem for us, simply because they cannot justly be expected even to understand it fully. The least we can say is that any help we get from the Netherlands in this problem is bound to be limited.

To mention a third direction in which we might turn for help, we have often felt our closest affinity to be with the fundamentalists. But here again an appeal for help in the present problem is bound to be disappointed. For Fundamentalism is part of the very problem which we seek to overcome in this connection.

All of the above can be taken with some reservations. In some of those cases, and perhaps in each, there is some measure of aid and comfort which we can gain from our accustomed allies. But the contention remains basically true; the problem is ours.

It has been contended, therefore, that we face a dilemma; we face it handicapped by the internal weakness of our own defensive attitude; and we face it alone, with only limited assistance to be expected from various secondary aids on which we have often relied. Now is it possible finally to indicate the direction in which the solution of this difficulty is to be sought?

* * *

IF our problem is how to communicate our distinctive faith to our neighbors, the first question to be clearly settled is this; what is this distinctive doctrine which we seek to transmit? There are many outside observers who would be quick to answer that question for us. Our distinctive doctrine as Calvinists is the doctrine of election.

Granting momentarily that this automatic identification of Calvinism with predestination is valid, we need not be apologetic about that fact. The doctrine of election is not merely Calvinistic. Every one of the major Reformers held it, even though the followers of Luther soon ceased to stress it or teach it in its complete form. And that unanimity on the part of the Reformers suggests another conclusion which is easily confirmed; this is not merely Reformation doctrine, with all the temporal qualifications which that would seem to imply. It is Augustinian. More important still, it is Pauline, Scriptural, confirmed by the *analogia fide*. We are in good company in our adherence to this doctrine.

But more significant still, this is not the whole of Calvinism. We must exert ourselves to correct, rather than meekly accept, this caricature of the Calvinistic system. Not that we may submerge the doctrine of election as if we were ashamed of it; but both the doctrine and our adherence to it must be seen in their true perspective. To say the least, true Calvinism is both this doctrine and the approach by which Calvin arrived at it. And his estimate and use of Scripture are just as distinctive in our day as this resulting doctrine. Our neighbors will not understand us unless we convey this to them. And we ourselves will become badly warped in our Calvinism if we just accept the impoverished notion of it which has become current.

The point to be made, both to ourselves and to our neighbors is that our position is Scriptural. It is historic Christianity that we represent. This is a significant point first with respect to ourselves. It is nothing new to us, of course, but it ought not to be obscured. In our presentation of our

position, we ought carefully to avoid any suggestion of the process of stopping with the creeds, going back to Scripture only for proof-texts. We ought rather to be using Scripture directly, with the creeds, of course, as aids and guides. Somehow our own people have succumbed to the idea that the dispensationalists are more Biblical than we are. We can hardly expect them to be aggressive in the propagation of their faith unless they know that their basis is more respectable than that.

But this is a significant consideration also with respect to our neighbors. Not only is the Scripture a stronger talking-point than a nationally-oriented creed. But the situation which we face religiously in America is to a large extent not the choice between one Christian creed and another, but Christianity itself versus paganism. The extent to which this is true is far greater than that suggested by the statistics of church membership. Even taking the percentages at face value, the profession of millions is half-hearted at best, and the religion they profess nothing better than a philosophy of religion which is more dangerous than nothing at all. And if we shy away from proselytism in addressing such spiritually starved people as this, we are no longer true to our trust.

How then do we proceed to communicate historic Christianity in the face of the difficult situation which confronts us? There is room only to suggest a few avenues of approach. My first suggestion is that we ought to adopt the *aggressive* approach. This ought to characterize the average member as well as the minister. It must be found in the established city church as well as the mission station. Difficult — and sometimes fruitless — as it may seem, the *average* church service must have the visitor in mind. The aggressive approach must have the cooperation of all the ministers. The old distinction between the small minority of mission-minded ministers and the great majority of "regular pastors" must fall away. This approach must permeate theological education. Valuable and necessary as a professor of missions would be at Calvin Seminary, such an appointment could not be a panacea. Unless each professor is concerned to see the evangelistic implications of his discipline, we will have a situation in which the professor of missions pulls the student in one direction and everybody else steers him in another. And even academically we will not be doing our duty, for an education which does not bear in mind the contemporary mission of the church is not really relevant to our place in the world and history.

Second, we must adopt more fully the *exegetical, Biblical-theological* approach. Calvin Seminary's strength and the strength of the Christian Reformed Church is traditionally in dogmatics. Now of course we need dogmaticians. But we do not need and cannot use scholasticism. We need Biblical scholars; Biblical studies; Biblical dogmatics; Biblical ethics; Biblical catechism preaching.

Third, I would suggest a greater concentration on a *constructive* approach. This has particular bearing on the world-and-life view which we profess to have. Even more concretely it bears on the institutions we raise to express that view. Such things as separate schools and separate labor organizations are excellent in their place. But we are a small minority, and what strength and influence we will have must come through the force of our ideas rather than our numbers. Whether in separate organizations or not, what will have effect is the program which we seek to put into operation.

And the final element of our approach which I would suggest is *self-appraisal.* We must examine ourselves and come to conclusions as to what is basic and necessary and what is circumferential and expendable. We must know these things, even if the knowledge is sometimes painful. Then on the basis of that which is necessary to our position as Reformed Christians in America, let us show love to the neighbor and invite him into our most intimate circles. He will not rob us of anything precious; much rather, he will enrich us. I can think of no valid reason why we should not make whatever changes and adjustments are necessary to welcome *all true Christians* to our midst.

* * *

And what is the outlook if we proceed in this fashion? It would seem on the surface that, despite every valid accommodation and every noble effort, the results would be small. If we refer once more to the difficulties noted at the outset, it does not seem that the measures recommended are sufficient to overcome them. There seems to be little reason to expect a flood of converts into the Christian Reformed Church, no matter how resolutely we approach our task.

Even if this estimate is true, the responsibility of witnessing remains ours. We may not discard our historic heritage for the sake of popularity, of course. It would not be right, and it could not prove fruitful, no matter how superficially we might measure fruitfulness. If we are caught up by our calling, we cannot avoid the responsibility of speaking as courageously and eloquently as possible concerning the faith delivered to us. There is something normative about this; let us go ahead and witness, counting neither cost nor results.

But there is another cloud upon the horizon, even though it is no bigger than a man's hand. Perhaps it promises refreshing rain. Perhaps the problem is not quite as hopeless as I have made it appear. On either end of the religious scale there is a possibility of greater significance in the future for our witness to the faith. On the one hand there are many people in the American churches who have lagged far behind the theological development — or rather decay — in their seminaries and pulpits. And on the other hand, some of the best thinkers and leaders the country knows are asking deeper questions concerning faith and reality than have been asked for many a weary year. There are many people groping for answers today, and in the process of looking for them they are saying anew some of the things we have been trying to say all along. Let us join our voices to theirs as we emerge from our cocoon. Let us encourage them where we can; correct them where necessary; and even learn from them, for surely wisdom will not die with us! Perhaps there are new gains, new thrills, new victories in store for us after all. And by "us" I mean not just this denomination, dearly though we love it; but the cause of Jesus Christ in this great land of ours.

The Dutch Schools and Ours

by PETER OPPEWALL*

THERE has been a marked upswing in interest recently in our circles toward the mother country. Intercourse between the two Reformed communities, once limited largely to theological ideas and carried out by ministers, is now spreading to many levels. There are several reasons for this growing interaction, but two strike the eye immediately: the large number of immigrants, and the increasing number of students who have been doing advanced work on the other side.

One of the wholesome results of this interchange has been an increased awareness of the differences between the two cultures. This awareness has led to much discussion, at least on an informal basis, of the features which are unique in home, church, and school. Careful and critical study of these differences will continue to be salutary.

Education presents one of the most fruitful areas for comparison. Here the differences are greatest. Here the radicalness of the American experiment is most evident. The "American ideal" at its best and at its worst is exemplified in our school system. Even a brief comparison of the educational systems of the United States and the Netherlands will reveal differences in structure and in outlook. These differences are generally recognized, but the interest on our side tends, I think, to be academic; that is, we have a cold, objective curiosity about the thing, but we hardly expect to look across the ocean for patterns of education which we might emulate.

Here, perhaps, we have been too hasty. We assume that Europe with its outmoded techniques and antiquated attitudes can have nothing to say to us when we consider our own educational problems. At a time when education in this country, both public and private, is undergoing unprecedented criticism and revaluation, we of the Reformed community do well to look once again more closely at our Dutch antecedents. At the very least this will give us a sharper realization of the great distance we have traveled, and at best it may point out to us good remedies for our excesses. I propose to describe the Dutch secondary school system with a view to suggesting at least one revision in our own structure, a revision which I see as an answer to one of the besetting sins of American education.

* * *

THE European system embodies a variety of school types, with strict uniformity within the type. In the Netherlands, schools on the elementary level are much the same in curriculum. The major division comes at the end of the first six years, when the students are twelve or thirteen. Then they must commit themselves definitely to one of three main types of education: advanced elementary, technical-agricultural, or secondary. Among the technical schools, there is wide variety of choice. Many of the crafts and trades have separate schools, such as fishing, navigation, horticulture, dairying, etc. Of the advanced elementary schools there are two types: continued elementary school, designed for those who go neither to a secondary school nor a trade school and yet must stay in school for an additional year or two to round out the age requirement (between 14 and 15); and the U. L. O., or M. U. L. O. (*Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs*). The MULO is the Dutch educational unit most comparable to our high school. Students attend three or four years. It serves to prepare students for more advanced schools such as the commercial or teacher-training school. Even at this level the language training is more intensive than our own. All students get three years of French, German, and English.

The secondary schools in the Netherlands are completely different in nature and scope from any of those mentioned so far. There are two main types: the H.B.S. *Hoge Burger School*), which is five years, and the *Gymnasium*, which is six years. A third type, the *Lyceum*, is really nothing more than a combination of the two; both divisions are fully represented. Such schools are becoming increasingly popular because they postpone the necessity of making a choice between the H.B.S. and the *Gymnasium* course for two years.

The original aim of the *gymnasium*, still held to almost exclusively, was to give a classical training, leading up to and preparing for study at the University — which in the Netherlands means specialized study comparable to our graduate school work. The *H.B.S.* is largely intended to provide a commercial or scientific training, but it still prepares for some branches of university work: economics, social sciences, medicine, etc.

The remarkable thing about these Dutch secondary schools is the size and quality of the job they do. Since they have only the best students to work with, and since the instructors are nearly all eminently qualified for their position (nearly all *gymnasium* teachers have the equivalent of a doctor's degree) they teach with a vigor and thoroughness to be matched nowhere in our high schools, and perhaps only in the best of our colleges.

Consider the program of the *gymnasium*: all students takes five years of Greek, six years of Latin, six years of Dutch, six of French, four of German, five of English, six of History and Geography, and six of Mathematics. Natural science, chemistry, natural history, and drawing are also included. There is only one element of choice in the whole curriculum, and that comes at the end of four years. Then students may choose for their last two years between the *alpha* and the *beta* course. The alphas get additional concentration in Greek and Latin, while the betas specialize more heavily in the sciences; but still both courses include some of the other. The *gymnasium* graduate at eighteen or nineteen has read Caesar, Ovid, Cicero, Livius, Plinius, Tacitus, and Virgil; Xenophon, Homer, Herodotus, and Plato; all in the original.

The *H.B.S.* offers no Latin or Greek, but the intensity and thoroughness of the program is very nearly as great. Graduates of the science division of the *H.B.S.* are ready to start their university medical training, which is similar to our own.

* * *

IT is difficult to compare these secondary schools with our own because of the difference in curriculum, but the vast superiority of the *gymna-*

*Mr. Oppewall is Instructor in English at Calvin College.

Dutch Schools and Ours — Continued

sium in achievement is pointed up by the fact that graduates are accepted as third-year students in our colleges. Our own achievements, especially in the languages, are dwarfed by comparison. No matter whether we measure how much they do or how well they do it, the Dutch secondary schools are far superior to our own in academic achievement.

There are several reasons for this superiority. One of these is the singleness of mind with which teacher and student alike pursue their educational objective. Distractions are kept to a minimum. Adequate attention is paid to physical exercise, but beyond this the school sets up as its objective the training of the mind. Little time is given to the teaching of "Good citizenship" or "personality development."

This singleness of mind is shared by parents as well as by teachers and students. The *middelbare* school graduate is looked up to by all, not so much for economic as for social and cultural reasons. Thus the student is constantly urged on in his heavy tasks by the respect and admiration of his friends, relatives, and society in general.

This is only possible, of course, with select personnel. Herein lies the secret of achievement. Only about nine percent of elementary school graduates go to the *middelbare* schools. These do not necessarily represent the top ten percent intellectually, since social position and economic status are also factors, but certainly only those whose mental equipment is well above average can keep up the pace.

Another factor is the uniformity of academic standards. They are kept high by national control. All schools of the same type offer the same course, and graduates must take standardized tests administered by the national government. These tests provide one more powerful incentive to keep standards up. Should any one school slip in a given field, the fault shows up immediately when examinations come.

* * *

It is obvious that education in America, and here now I mean our own Christian school system as well, differs radically from that of Europe, and especially of the Netherlands. Their graduates are superlatively equipped for university, that is, specialized training. At this point I think we can learn a lesson. The contrast with the job our own secondary schools are doing is painful. Here I need not go into details. The failure of our high schools to provide even the minimum essentials for college education has been pointed out again, in scholarly as well as in popular books and magazines. Our own periodicals have shown the same concern with the job that our Christian schools are doing, and our own graduates are no better prepared for college than those of the public schools.

There are various reasons for this lack of academic achievement in our school system. But I am concerned here only with a cause which is isolable, and therefore remediable. It consists of our carrying the American democratic ideal to an illogical extreme, of our assuming that because everyone has equal rights he also has equal abilities, or at least that these abilities can best be nurtured when he is given the same training in exactly the same way as everyone else. The great crime of American education is not that it has fed a watered-dawn diet to the many, but that it has offered the same diluted pap to its best minds, its future leaders in every field of endeavor.

It is generally recognized that American schools are geared, not for the top 10%, not even for the top one-third, but for the broad, undistinguished average, the group where the greatest numbers lie, the middle fifty or sixty percent. And today, with our increasing emphasis on teaching skills and on social development, it is questionable as to whether the minds of even these students are operating at more than half of their mental capacity. What becomes of the rest? What happens to an above average mind when it slides along always in the same easy groove? What happens to the will when abilities are continually idling at one-third or one-quarter speed? Any college freshman can give you the answer: "I never had to work in high school," or "I never learned to study by myself." Instead of getting the rich nourishment they deserve, these better minds are stifled and stultified. Not only is there lack of pressure or even incentive to do outstanding work, but there is actually a downward pressure which may act as a powerful deterrent. Few adolescents aspire to rise above the average, at least not intellectually. The term "brain" as it is bandied about among contemporary high school students is no more intended to be complimentary than its adult equivalent: "egghead."

It has long been recognized that the American high school is not the best place for the superior student to learn habits of achievement, even though the damage which is done is usually underrated. Those who conceive of the high school as a place to learn to get along with people are not too perturbed by the results. But those who look to it as a training ground for future intellectual achievement are dismayed.

It is often said that a good student will find himself at college. Some do, unquestionably. But at what a price. Habits of slothfulness, of being content with a half-job, acquired during the formative years, are not shucked along with the high school cap and gown. The loss of time and lack of accomplishment are serious enough, but worse yet is the establishment of slovenly habits of working and thinking.

The average student, of course, does not suffer as much. In this connection it is significant to note that many students of average ability as tested by a psychological test and the Minnesota Reading test (given by Calvin College to all freshmen) often adjust more quickly and even do better work than many of their more able but erratic classmates.

* * *

This discrimination against our best talent represents a chronic and pressing problem which can only be met satisfactorily by a drastic remedy. There is only one solution, and that is an obvious one. It is time that we went back to the ideal and practice of our forbears, that of separate schools for superior students. Why should we not have, in our own school system, the equivalent of the Dutch *gymnasium*? We need not necessarily imitate their curriculum, but we would do well to take over their selectivity of students, their emphasis on languages and the classics, and their thoroughness.

The question is not so much any more whether something extra

should be done for the superior students. The only real question is how we should go about it. There have been scattered and belated attempts to undo this great injustice. The practice of "homogeneous grouping," or dividing students into separate levels according to ability is increasing, also in our own schools.

It may be argued that special attention can best be given within the present system through a continuation or extension of stratified teaching. With this I disagree. I believe the European method has distinct advantages. The drive for conformity in our school system is now so great that it would be extremely difficult to produce anything unique or distinctive. This drive, so necessary a concomitant of the melting-pot process which made one nation out of many nations, has outlived its usefulness. It now does as much harm as it does good. Its end-product is a weak and watered down lowest common denominator. This tendency has been increasing, and the end is not yet. We are long over-due for steps which will reverse this process, or at least slow it down. Since the schools are its most effective instrument, it is in the schools that the change must first come.

The difference I am looking for must come not only in breadth or intensiveness of preparation, but also in a set of mind, a love of learning, a wholesome respect for superior intellectual achievement; all things which are lacking in our high school graduates today; are found in a rich measure in the secondary school graduate of the continental system; are extremely difficult to instil at age eighteen; but which might conceivably still be instilled in our children in spite of the pragmatic and materialistic spirit which surrounds them; provided that you could get them early from homes where there is at least some respect for culture, and into separate schools run by people with superior talents and equipment, with an articulated Christian philosophy of life.

I do not see how these things can be achieved in our schools of today. Perhaps it is already too late to achieve them at all. Perhaps there are not enough left who believe in the value of the old disciplines, who feel that our educational system today produces too few well-rounded, well-integrated, broadly-based leaders and scholars, and who would be willing to support such a school and such a program with their time and their talents. I believe and hope otherwise. I believe that the benefits of such an education are demonstrable; have, in fact, been already demonstrated to us by the secondary school graduates of the Netherlands; and will be increasingly appreciated once such a school has been put into operation.

The best starting age would be twelve or thirteen, the age at which the Dutch student starts the *gymnasium*. A student who went to such a school for five or six years would be ready to step into the sophomore or junior year at Calvin, just as the *gymnasium* graduates do now. There many of them might fit into an honors program which would enable them to continue at their own speed to do independent work under the direction of qualified men in their chosen field. At the age of twenty or twenty-one they would be superlatively equipped to take advantage of the increasing number of scholarships available for graduate work, and I freely predict that many of those who persevere this far would continue to excell, whether they went into the ministry or Christian education, or continued to do graduate work in the humanities, sciences, or social sciences. They would have the broad base in the humanities which is now lacking, especially in our science and social science students, and which is still too thin in our education and theology students. Here, too, we might find people with the training and the inclination to become real scholars, the lack of which in our circles was pointed out to us in the *Journal* by Dr. Henry Zylstra. All this could, I am confident, be achieved in the same length of time we now take, provided we start with above average students, go at an accelerated pace, and cut out some of the fads and frills which beset our schools now.

We have individuals now, of course, who excel in the way I have described, but they are far too few. They do so in spite of the system, not because of it. Too many of our most able people are lost to the academic world altogether. Too many more are going into science and business. It is common knowledge that the sciences are attracting the best students today; increasingly so, I fear, in our own circles. Surely we of Calvinistic persuasion should be channeling our best people into the areas of greatest sacrifice and Christian service. A school such as I have suggested might possibly do something about the materialistic spirit which is gripping our youth. If it could begin to reverse this tendency, it would certainly have earned its way.

* * *

Canon Bernard Iddings Bell, one of the most incisive critics of American education which our generation has produced, divides the failings of our school system into four categories (*Life*, October 16, 1950):

1. "Its reluctance to insist on those formative disciplines which alone can promise proficiency in doing and thinking .... what Pestalozzi called "the disciplines of word, number and form." Today we cannot claim our education to be successful in instructing in any one of the three.

2. "... A basic irresponsibility which it develops in students. For society there is danger of the gravest instability when its youth are unchallenged in the impression that one may eat one's cake and have it too, that there can be reward without quest, wages without work, a master's prestige without master's skill, marriage without fidelity, national security without individual sacrifice."

3. "... it seems to presuppose that, for education to be democratic, every man's child must be treated as the equal of every other man's child, both in kind of brains and in educability ... The point is that our colleges are neither discovering nor preparing those few — be they from palaces or slums, from any social or ethnical group — who potentially are fit to serve their own people as leaders ... The truth today is that we are plentifully supplied with people who can make things and incredibly short of people who understand things."

4. "... its seeming bafflement by religion."

The type of school I am advocating would be tailored to meet all of these objections.

Beginning such a school would be one way for us to let our light shine in the educational world, for if we do something distinctive in our approach to secondary education, the general public will surely take note of it.

As long as we fail to do the most we can in our educational program, also for the best minds entrusted to our care, we have not met our covenantal obligations.

Two Orders of Excellence

by ROBERT OTTEN*

THE Seven Deadly Sins — a fiction of the Medievals some say, but actually the unhappy discovery of our first father — are as real today as they have ever been. They are the sins of man in their primary form putting in jeopardy the soul which is blind to them. While their reality is recognized by all Christians, Christian students, that is, those for whom learning is their calling, are not always aware of the intellectual forms these sins may take. A student has to watch for them on two fronts, for in his life the vices have a double reference.

The interdependence of the will and the intellect, of the heart and the mind, has often been remarked, and the essay which follows shows us how one Medieval, Hugh of St. Victor, conceived of this relationship in the life of a student.

* * *

THE prime requisite for learning is humility; and though there are many instances of this, the three which follow especially relate to the student: First, the student must hold no knowledge cheap, be it scientific or literary; second, he must not feel ashamed to learn from another person; and third, when he has attained some knowledge himself, he must not despise others. Now what deceives many is this: they wish to seem wise prematurely; and for this reason they swell with such pride that they pretend to be the kind of people they are not, and blush at being what they actually are. And so they remove themselves even farther from the truth because their wish is not to *be* wise, but rather *considered* so.

"I know many students of this sort; they lack the elementary disciplines, but they think only the advanced subjects worthy of their interest, and they think themselves quite the scholars if they have read the writings or have heard the words of some wise men. Now a student of good sense is glad to listen to all his teachers, and will read all his assignments; he despises no piece of writing, no teacher, and no instruction. He seeks from all the knowledge which he observes he lacks, nor is his concern first of all what he *does* know, but rather, what he does *not* know.

"Again, the student who studies in an orderly way makes the most progress. Some want to do it by leaps and bounds, but their last bound takes them right over the precipice of ignorance. Make haste slowly: that's the quickest way to wisdom. Be willing to learn from all what you yourself do not know, for humility will put you in actual possession of that which Nature has merely put within your reach. You will be wiser than all if you are ready to learn from all: those who receive from all will be richer than all. And remember not to scorn any knowledge, for all knowledge is good. You see now how necessary this humility is.

"Further, you will find it to your advantage not to despise others, when you finally have caught on to something yourself. This sin of pride sometimes overtakes students because they watch over their own hoard of knowledge too carefully, with the result that they begin to imagine that they have gained intellectual riches which others — whom they have never seen — will never gain, nor were ever meant to, for that matter. And so these self-styled intellectuals, with all their verbal inanities, denounce their elders as ignoramuses, in the belief that wisdom entered the world with them and will depart with them. A good student is humble, intellectually well-mannered, entertains no worthless cares, and is insensible to the charms of the lower pleasures. He ought to de diligent and zealous in learning from others and not presume too much when it comes to his own abilities. This is what the humility of a student means."

* * *

BEHIND this essay lies a whole tradition of philosophy which asserted that a human being must develop human capacities, and that these capacities, fully realized, constitute his virtues, or better, his excellences. Further, these excellences are of two orders, the moral and the intellectual. The virtuous man, then, is the man who posseses both the moral and the intellectual excellences. Nor can the one kind of excellence be achieved in the absence of the other; they involve each other. But especially do the intellectual virtues depend upon the moral. We must not confuse the two orders; they may be inseparable but they are not identical. What the student is after is intellectual excellence; to achieve that is his job.

Let me illustrate: take, for example, the vice of sloth. In the moral order it is the sin of a workman who comes to his job late, lacks interest in it, and works lazily; it is the sin of a student who fails to put in his time with his books, studies untidily, and neglects opportunities for intellectual growth. In the intellectual order sloth is the refusal to think hard and painstakingly, failure to follow an author in his reasoning by checking and rechecking his logic. It is the search for the author's conclusions rather than his premises.

Or consider the virtue of honesty. The honesty of a student is one kind of honesty, that of a business man is another. The honesty of the business man is primarily moral, that of a student intellectual. You are, say, a banker; your duty as a banker requires you to follow the rules of banking and to obey the laws of the state. It means entering the correct amounts of money in your ledgers, making correct change, etc., etc. That is the honesty proper to a banker; it is moral honesty. Now suppose you also live the life of a student, by taking some extension course with a university. You will have to be morally honest, of course; there are classes to attend, assignments to read, and papers to write. While it is impossible to be a good student without fulfilling these requirements, faithfulness in these matters is still a part of moral honesty; and that is not the honesty of a student. The refusal to solicit aid in an examination does not constitute a student's honesty just as failing to credit his source with a footnote is not the dishonesty of a student; for this is mere theft, petty larceny, a moral fault.

To be honest as a student, *i.e.*, to be intellectually honest, you must read facts carefully, being scrupulous in your treatment and interpretation of them. All the facts are to be considered, and any attempt at interpre-

*Mr. Otten is Instructor in Classical Languages at Calvin College, currently on leave for further graduate study.

tion which requires you to disregard a single fact is an intellectually dishonest attempt. More than one philosophic system has failed because it disregarded such areas of fact and experience as would embarrass it. But the nemesis of such dishonesty is total ruin. On another level, intellectual honesty means fidelity to the premises of thought and action, a determination to see through the implications of one's beliefs and to act on these implications. It means refusing to wrest from assumptions conclusions they do not yield, and a readiness to abandon the grounds of an action together with the action itself.

* * *

It is pride perhaps which is, as our author observes, the greatest vice of the student; there is no more persistent threat to intellectual progress. Humility is the attitude of the real student, for where there is no humility there is no learning. If we would be the masters of knowledge, we must be the servants of truth, whether this be the truth of fact or imagination, of science or philosophy, of reason or revelation.

The virtues, or excellences, of a student, then, as man are moral, as student intellectual. The two orders of excellence together make up the complete, the perfect man. This is the perfection of the student. The student in whom the will and the mind work cooperatively towards a proper end is living a whole, an integral life. And if this is the integral life, it is the life of integrity and hence the honest life.

"They Might Start Reading"

by J. K. VAN BAALEN*

A Christian Reformed minister told one of his colleagues that he made it a point to preside at each and every midweek meeting conducted in his congregation, and to be the sole Bible teacher, no matter how busy it would make him. Asked if he did not train the better informed or talented among his flock to take over part of this work, he replied, "I should say not. I do not let a thing escape from me. If I did, they might start reading themselves. Some might even begin to read commentaries and to criticize my sermons."

This astonishing little episode lays bare one of the most vulnerable points in our Christian Reformed Church. The minister feels so ill equipped intellectually that he dreads a possible ability on the part of some to discover his mental poverty. Consequently he keeps on dishing out from his near-vacuum without taking sufficient time and effort to replenish his meagre supply, and meanwhile he undernourishes his constituency lest they reach the point where they might discover the scantiness of his stock, or grow up to demand the strong meat he is incapable of feeding them.

Thus we arrive at the deadlock of a vicious circle: a minister who is too busy to grow mentally with a congregation that is purposely kept in a state where it not only wants milk but fails to realize that there is something besides baby food. Under these circumstances, all too common we have occasion to believe, both pastor and flock suffer in more ways than one.

It was in such a locality that the owner of a Christian bookstore remarked, "Seventy-five percent of the books we sell go to Baptists and Pentecostals and others. If we had to live on the books we sell to Christian Reformed people — in the majority there — we might as well go out of business."

This is that Christian Reformed Church that boasts of its intellectually construed type of Christianity, and fancies itself superior to other denominations. Have we not our Forms of Unity to which all nominally subscribe though few have read them? A look into the living room in many a home will soon convince that those creedal documents are conspicuous by their absence, dead documents that have been forgotten, entrusted to the custody of official guardians of the faith. These are supposed to have all the answers, and to do our thinking for us. The number of books and magazines in evidence in the average Christian Reformed home includes a few childhood novels or the latest fiction in digest, the *Reader's Digest*, *Time* and *Life* magazines, and the *National Geographic* picture album, and you can't even get the latter without some one suggesting your name for membership, and ain't that sumpin' to be proud of? Books on the Christian religion are often limited to a long neglected "catechism book," a little gift book presented at the time of public confession of faith, and the Back to God *Family Altar* which is free for the asking.

* * *

Why read? We have the radio and television, and our preachers think for us — or fail to do so. All of which gives birth to what has been called a "dominees-geloof," that is to say, I believe it because our preacher says so. Such a faith is not far removed from the Romish *fides implicita*, a faith that accepts without understanding, upon the mere authority of a priest as a duly constituted representative of an infallible church. But that was exactly what the Reformers were shying away from. It is therefore interesting to observe the nemesis of historic development. One-time Calvinistic New England, having lost interest in its creed, drifted into Unitarianism, and now has in Boston one of our chief strongholds of Catholicism.

But does not a belief upon authority suffice, provided it is the proper authority and the right type of belief? It does not, and that for the simple reason that such a *dominees-geloof* is not a personally acquired and individually appropriated faith. It is a matter of tradition. And tradition that has not been forged upon the anvil of personal *strife* ("Strive to enter in at the narrow gate"), the strife of the intellect as well as of the will and the emotions, has little value. It is bound to be an "easy come, easy go" affair. It is valued little because it has cost little;

*Rev. Van Baalen, lately of Edmonton, Canada, is currently serving the Christian Reformed churches in the Lynden, Washington area.

They Might Start Reading — Continued

and what is slightly valued is lightly surrendered.

We have always maintained in our group that practice follows hard upon theory. I myself have often stated this truth as follows: It makes all the practical difference in the world whether we conceive of Jesus as an exalted man or as God and man; in the first case we may try to follow his example, in the second we first worship, then endeavor to follow Him.

True, then, practice is built upon theory. Yet the opposite is just as true. Theory is forged to comply with custom and habit. A man who leads a life contrary to God's commands — all the more when the orthodox tradition still weighs with him — will look for a theory that puts him at ease. The vagaries of some modern psychologists will offer him a welcome haven of refuge from the uncomfortable doctrines of total depravity and personal responsibility. Then, when these doctrines no longer have any practical value, they are easily discarded, and "who cares?"

* * *

No amount of running around in aimless circles or earning the congregation's appraisal that "Our dominie is such a nice man, so common, so sincere, and always ready for everybody" — no amount of this cheap substitute for hard work can atone for the minister's shirking of his duty.

And what is the minister's chief and foremost duty? It is to be a *verbi divini minister*, that is one who administers the divine word as well as the sacraments according to Christ's will and ordinance. And that divine word is no twenty-five-cent pocket edition. It is a gigantic job, far beyond any human heart and brain, to grasp and to interpret in the light and darkness of modern times the word of God. A man can make but a small beginning in a single lifetime. Nevertheless, the faithful preacher is he who keeps forever learning how to bring out of the treasure of his heart things new-and-old.

Said a young minister, recently graduated from three eight-months years in Calvin Seminary: "Van Baalen writes that we must study, study, study! but I'd like to take him to the book of Acts and show him how Paul preached the gospel from house to house." "Yes," replied our late brother Herman Wierenga, "That is right: preach from house to house, but there is a difference between preaching and coffee drinking."

This is not meant as though a young minister should always study. Or as if he may not help his wife somewhat with the housework or have some recreation. But when the fishing, golfing, plus the practical work in the congregation, send the minister scurrying to his study on Friday afternoon with a few hours to spare to plagiarize a few thoughts together for Sunday morning, there is something radically wrong. At best, one will have to fight in our busy and crowded modern life for time to study; but as one of my teachers said, "There are so many lost quarter hours and half hours that might be spent studying or at least reading, if only the mind is kept in tune."

* * *

All lengthiness, wordiness, muddiness, slouchiness, unclear presentation in the pulpit is due to one thing only: insufficient preparation. All leaning upon an easy flow of words, ability to think upon one's feet, inspiration of the moment, is sinful.

How could it be anything else when functioning as God's soundbox, the mouthpiece of the Allknowing and Sovereign God of the universe, and the microphone through which God broadcasts his ineffable mercy in Christ Jesus? It matters not whether there are three or three thousand in the "audience": only that it is easier speaking to a large number, hence the smaller one requires fully as much preparation. For always Jesus is in the audience, and for ever holy angels are envying the sinner his privilege of proclaiming the gospel.

This is a staggering thought. It would be enough to dissuade any man from trying to be a preacher after the first few attempts. But there is always the emboldening fact that the Holy Spirit takes over when the man has done his best, sometimes amid disturbing circumstances. In answer to the final petition for help breathed during the congregation's silent prayer, many a man has experienced that in preaching, too, he is strong when he is weak. But who dares to ask the Holy Spirit for help when he knows that he has wasted precious hours given him for preparation? One might as well ask for a harvest from a field that has not been farmed.

Only such a minister can make the people tremble at the word of God who himself has shuddered before the duty of interpreting words that came directly from the heart of the Eternal. And he cannot be satisfied when the hearers say, "I enjoyed your message, Pastor," or, as one man was wont to expostulate with a booming voice in one long breath: "That-sure-went-over-big-yessir-it-was-a banner day!"

* * *

Such men, while pointing to God's word, are themselves the first beneficiaries of their assiduous efforts. Their earnest preparation for the pulpit aids them in all their other work. In their old age they may say with a noted preacher, "Nowadays I preach from the overflow."

They welcome elders such as we had forty and even thirty years ago, men who took the Form for Ordination seriously, diligent students of the Bible and deacons able to quote "words of consolation and cheer from Scripture." They will leave behind for their successors in the ministry a congregation that is well founded, Bible nurtured men and women who are readers, miniature theologians, given to that most interesting of studies that deals directly with God's chiefest revelation concerning Himself.

When such men and women, or even youngsters, come the pastor with questions concerning his sermons, he rejoices. For he has made them thoughtful listeners. And he knows that they will instinctively approach him with respect because they realize that the minister knows whereof he speaks and cannot be lightly brushed aside.

No church like that will be swift carried away with all winds of doctrine. No minister such as this will fear lest his people might start reading themselves, be it commentaries, Bible dictionaries, or God's writing in current history. Instead he will make it one of his concerns to keep a watchful eye upon what goes into and what is taken out of the local congregational church library.

Christian Education: The Past

by W. T. RADIUS*

I shall write in this and in a concluding article about our Christian schools and about Calvin College. At first I thought that I could treat each quite separately, thus dividing what I have to say into two neat packages. But whenever I got to thinking about our Christian schools, Calvin obtruded itself; and again, the Christian schools inevitably get mixed into reflections about Calvin. I am convinced that the one without the other is unthinkable; no Christian schools, no Calvin College, and if there be no Calvin College or its equivalent it will not be long before our Christian schools as we now know them and love them will have ceased to exist. Our work at Calvin, that of giving instruction in the various branches of higher learning in the light of our Reformed faith, would fail miserably if the overwhelming majority of our students were not the product of our Christian school system. It's a pretty big job to make a Calvinist. Without our homes, our churches and our Christian schools the capstone of Calvin College simply would not fit. In fact, I don't think it would exist.

Calvin College and the Christian schools have the same ancestry; they both arose out of the life of the Reformed churches. However, there is a difference. Calvin as a liberal arts college was brought into being over the years to implement what was felt to be a foremost obligation of the church, namely, to train its own clergy, or to use the words in the charter of King's College, which later became Columbia University, "to bequeath to the churches a learned clergy." This objective of a clergy equipped with the best humanistic education that the day and age could supply lay directly in the mainstream of the Reformed tradition, right back to the days of John Calvin himself. Indeed, its true origin goes back to the early centuries of the Christian Church.

* * *

*Dr. Radius is Professor of Classical Languages and Literature at Calvin College. This article, with a companion piece which will appear in next month's *Journal*, is the substance of an address delivered at the 35th Annual Convention of the National Union of Christian Schools held in Lynden, Washington, in August of this year.

It was a matter of the utmost significance for the whole course of Western civilization that the Christian leaders of the fourth century, Lactantius, Jerome, Ambrose and especially the incomparable Augustine were able to accept what was valid in the culture of antiquity. They came after much soul-searching to understand that the intellectual achievements of the foremost Greek and Roman thinkers in the several domains of life and reality, those accomplishments which we traditionally describe as gifts of God's common grace, — these, I say, they came to understand were capable of being separated from pagan religion. Had they decided that it was impossible to separate pagan learning from pagan religion it is doubtful that Classical civilization would have survived. You must recall that beginning with Constantine the Christian emperor of the third century, the Christian church was no longer the persecuted minority, but virtually the state church, and the old pagan religion was now on the defensive. Humanly speaking, it lay within the power of the Church to destroy the total intellectual and cultural achievement of Greece and Rome and to hand on to succeeding generations a Christianity which as a consequence would have been altered beyond all recognition, and which because of its intellectual impoverishment would have, again humanly speaking, soon perished from the face of the earth.

But in the providence of God it was not so to be. After struggles of conscience the ablest men of the Church realized that pagan cultural achievement was separable from paganism, and that Christianity could not refuse the aid of education and scholarship. How necessary this was, a moment's reflection will make clear. To take an example from only one aspect of the total life of the Church, if each man in his untutored ignorance was to set himself up as an expositor of Scripture nothing but the utmost confusion would result and the life of the Church would be in jeopardy.

The fatal error of the Classical civilization had been the separation of religion and learning. These two, that is, religion and learning, came to them along separate and distinct avenues. Not that religion was not in evidence among them. Indeed it was. Temples, cult statues and altars were everywhere, as St. Paul observed when he got to Athens. Their literature too was filled with the gods and their doings. Zeus and the other Olympian deities move about in the epic and dramatic poetry of both Greece and Rome with perfect ease and familiarity. But it was the study of philosophy, not the practice of or belief in religion, which in Greek ethical thinking led to the good life. Religion sprang from the forgotten past of the Greek and Roman peoples and was ritualistic and contractual. It demanded neither reform of the will nor adhesion to a body of doctrine. It was concerned solely with rites and externalities of worship — a sort of contract or bargain between God and man. Learning and morals came to them by way of the intellectual awakening which followed upon the Greek Middle Ages — the ancients had their own ancient, medieval and modern periods — and reached its finest flowering in the great Periclean Age of the fifth century B. C.

Now it is this separation of religion and learning and the evils that follow in its train which the third and fourth century leaders of the Church understood so well, and we must thank God that they chose as they did. They saw clearly that Christianity was either everything or it was nothing. No area of life could be exempted from its dictates, least of all, the life of learning and the intellect.

* * *

I began by saying that Calvin College and the Christian schools have the same ancestry, but that there was, however, a difference. The College had the immediate and practical objective of implementing the training of the clergy. The Christian schools, in the absence of any clearly defined immediate and practical purpose, are a wonderful testimony to the conviction that Christianity must permeate all of life, and these schools are in direct line of descent from Lactantius writing about the year 300 A. D. as follows:

> God willed this to be the nature of man, that he should be desirous and eager for two things, religion and

> wisdom. But men are mistaken in this, that they either undertake religion and pay no attention to wisdom, or they devote themselves to wisdom alone, and pay no attention to religion, though the one cannot be true without the other. The consequence is that they fall into a multiplicity of religions, but false ones, because they have left wisdom . . . or they devote themselves to wisdom, but a false wisdom, because they have paid no attention to the religion of the Supreme God, who might have instructed them to the knowledge of the truth (*Divine Institutes*, Bk. III, chap. II).

About a hundred years later St. Augustine extends such ideas into a philosophy of history and learning. In one of his letters he writes as follows:

> Far be it from us to suppose that God abhors in us that by virtue of which he has made us superior to other animals. Far be it, I say, that we should believe in such a way as to exclude the necessity either of accepting or requiring reason, since we could not even believe unless we possessed rational souls (Letter 120.3).

From Augustine the succession is dimmed but never really broken in the centuries that follow. It was kept alive in the religious orders of the Middle Ages and passed on into our modern world by the renewed interest and study of the great Protestant Reformers.

Do you realize that we with our Christian schools and Calvin College have in our possession a far bigger treasure than we generally are aware of? Too often while clinging tenaciously to the idea of Christian education we do, however, create the impression that we are apologetic of the whole movement, and we act as if it were a provincialism of which we refuse, perhaps because of a Dutch stubbornness, to rid ourselves. I haven't the time here to work it out, but I am convinced that it could be shown that of all the institutions in our modern world the Christian school has the soundest of grounding in reason and in history, and its credentials are as valid as the Christian church itself. I toss it out here for what it is worth and I leave it to your consideration, but it is my guess that the present impasse in our current debate of the common grace issue could, if not be resolved, at least enter on new and more fruitful lines of study if we were to apply ourselves to the investigation of the way in which the Christian church of the third and fourth centuries grappled with the pagan world. We would then see that the Christian school movement, from kindergarten through Calvin College, the Free University and whatever similar institutions there be, stands in the most honored and respectable of Christian traditions. Our schools are not emergency devices to meet the need of a twentieth century that has lost its way. They are of the very fabric of history itself.

Many have undertaken to demonstrate that these schools are involved in the covenant teaching of the Old Testament. We must carry that study forward into the New Testament Church, into the growth and development of the Church in the Roman Empire, the expanding Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformation, the history of the movement in the Netherlands, and its transplanting into the larger arena of American life. I am very happy that Church History is becoming a part of our high school curriculum. I am not at all happy about our growing indifference to the study of the ancient languages, and to the study of the history of the ancient and the medieval world. Church History is eminently worthy of study, but remember that the Christian church is in the world, our Father's world, as we love to sing. The Church, like the individual Christian is not of the world, to be sure, but just as certainly it does not exist in a vacuum. We do indeed believe this, but the great need in the Christian school movement right now is that we come to greater clarity on how these schools are related to the history of Western civilization. Unless we do this the Christian school movement is going to become an adjunct of American Fundamentalism.

* * *

We are pleased to see non-Calvinistic church groups manifesting an interest in our schools. We must be on our guard lest they remake these schools into their own faulty conception of the relation of religion to culture. If this movement ever gets going in the Fundamentalist circles of our country we shall see the rise of a Christian school system that bears very little resemblance to the thing we now cherish. Conversely, it is also true that if we can control this development, who knows but that in the providence of God we may be a mighty force in transforming American Arminianism into the Reformed faith by way of the Christian school. Maybe we are come to the kingdom for just such a time as this!

It is often said that the Christian schools are the backbone of the Christian Reformed Church. They are indeed that and being that they are potentially far more. It isn't enough if we Reformed people merely preserve our heritage intact. Unless we bring these treasures to those who possess them not, we too will lose them. So then, if these schools are true to their mission they may be along with our radio ministry an important factor in calling America back to God.

It is a fine thing to call men to Christ, and the first test of a Christian is, am I committed whole heartedly with surrendered will to carry out God's intention as revealed in Christ? Even so, the surrendered will is not enough. You know as well as I that a characteristic weakness of American orthodox Christianity is its vagueness as to what a man must do after he surrenders his will to God. It is a fine thing to heed the altar call and to come forward. But then what! It was to answer that question, "What do I do with my life after I surrender to Christ?" that our fathers founded our Christian schools and Calvin College. Jesus did not only say, "Come unto me," but he added, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me."

* * *

And so we should take heart from what we have accomplished in the field of education. It is sometimes charged that we people of Dutch origin make good citizens, but in a negative way. We are law-abiding, thrifty, industrious, we pay our bills and keep our properties tidy. But what contribution, it is asked, do we make to the larger life of the commonwealth

We don't enter much into politics and we don't hold public office. This lack sometimes disturbs our brethren in the Netherlands and the Dutch who come to this country and to Canada. Yet it seems to me that whether our choice has been conscious or not we have on the whole chosen wisely and well. In the field of education we have accomplished something, and it is very doubtful that we could have achieved what we have if we had diverted our energies into the formation of political parties. There are differences between the Netherlands and the United States which would have made our political efforts end in futility and frustration. The establishment of a Christian grade school and then a high school in our communities lay within our competence and the good which can accrue from these schools for both the Church and the State is considerable and of far-reaching consequence.

That this achievement has not been greeted by public acclaim can be ascribed in large part to the prevailing American misconception, amounting to an obsession, concerning the necessity of keeping church and state in separate compartments of life. It is analogous to the fatal dualism of religion and the culture that we noted in the ancient Greek and Roman civilization and in practice it has meant not only the separation of church and state but the separation of religion from the secular affairs of American life, which is quite another matter. And it is sad to observe that too often our brethren in Christ, who confess in their churches that Jesus is Lord, have abetted this misconception of the role of religion in life. I am convinced that this is part of their unhistorical outlook. The Roman Church with its roots in the past has never been guilty of this folly.

What Are "Vacant" Churches?

by HAROLD PETROELJE*

I know what a vacant lot is. It's an area of ground which is left to itself. Apparently no one wants to build on it, and there's no concern for taking care of it. Passersby are likely to throw unwanted articles and papers into it, and soon it takes on a forlorn and desolate appearance.

As I walk along I can easily spot a vacant house. Curtainless windows stare streetwards and piles of papers and dirt are building up in the corners of the porch. Such a house fairly shouts to the observer that it is devoid of human occupants, and on that account is being made a victim of neglect.

Vacant lots are open parcels of real estate; vacant houses are untenanted dwellings; but what are vacant churches?

If definitions mean anything, one would conclude they must be buildings no longer used by worshipers. For one reason or another, the practice of the Christian religion must have been abandoned in that locality, and the mute witness to that exodus is the towered structure going to wreck and ruin.

As logical as such a deduction might be, he who thinks of vacant churches as really being vacant is in for a shock. That category is appearing more and more in ecclesiastical statistics and denominational surveys. In citing that there are hundreds of "vacant" churches, a rather dismal and alarming impression is fostered. It is as though a widespread defection from the institutional aspects of the Christian faith is rapidly taking place.

* * *

This phrase which is gaining in popular and editoral usage is really not as frightening as it looks and sounds. The intention is not to inform folk that so many religious edifices are empty on Sundays, or that so many erstwhile congregations of believers have forsaken Christ's ranks. Not at all. All that is attempted with such a description is to relate that a number of congregations are without the ministries of a resident pastor. By reason of new congregations constantly coming into existence and lack of sufficient ministerial man-power to shepherd all these groups of believers, vacant positions result.

Now it must be evident to any reflective person that it is one thing to say that the office of pastor in a local congregation is vacant, but quite a misstatement to label such as a "vacant" *church.* In such fell-swoop tactics, an entire body of believers is made, as it were, to evaporate because one man is lacking. Since when has the clergy assumed such an importance in Christ's Church?

That kind of terminology is faulty because it is false. Those churches are not vacant. They have their buildings which may well be filled with worshipers. They maintain the true administration of the Word and the Sacraments. Their spiritual needs are the concern of their duly elected officebearers. They participate in the denomination's support and program. To be sure, the members feel the need for a pastor of their "own," but they resent being classified as another "vacant" church, and rightly so. Their congregational schedule is made up of many societies, classes, and meetings: enthusiastically and loyally are they seeking to advance the work of the Lord; they are experiencing the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Their church vacant? How absurd! Not their church — but their *parsonage* is vacant. The home which the congregation provides its pastor is empty, and is eagerly awaiting a clerical occupant.

* * *

Such a classification is contraband, moreover, because it caters to the notion that the clergy make the church. A viewpoint that gets a great deal of popular circulation and approval — not without benefit from some clergy — is that a church simply must have a minister *to be a church.* Members of congregations without a regular pastor are often apologetic to visitors and others as they make the admission — "O, our church would be much better if we only had our own minister." They are of the opinion that theirs will be a flourishing and fruitful section of the Lord's vineyard

*The Rev. Mr. Petroelje is Minister of the Christian Reformed Church in Alameda, California.

if only they obtain the services of a successful husbandman. And so the efforts of many pastorless congregations are thrown into high gear to acquire a preacher that has personality, popularity, and prestige. "After all, just think what such a minister can do for *our* church!" As a consequence, some churches employ prayer plus pressure to get the man of their choice, while others play politics and offer prizes.

Now it goes without saying much about it that pastors are spiritually and practically necessary to a well-regulated church. This is true, however, not because ministers think so, or members say so; it is true because the Lord of the Church thinks so. After all, ministers have their calling of Christ and their availability for respective congregations is His provision. "And He (Christ) gave some to be apostles, and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11, 12). Though ministers are intimately associated and closely identified with the Church, nowhere does the New Testament make them the essence of the church.

As a matter of fact, some congregations are better off without the maneuverings of men passing themselves off as pastors. These self-seeking parsons have done violence to the body of Christ as they wrought sin and strife. Who can call a church "vacant" when it sighs with relief at the departure of such an operator? As a matter of historical record, many churches were compelled to get along without the services of a resident or full-time minister. Yet did that factor stay their efforts in promoting the Christian faith in their midst and surroundings? Quite the contrary. The cause of Christianity was mightily furthered by consecrated laity who, in the absence of educated professionals, assumed leadership and were prospered of the Lord. As a matter of present-day phenomena, nearly one-fifth of the congregations affiliated with the Christian Reformed denomination are in that pastorless state. By no means are all of them situated on the Western prairies or in the climes of Canada. Several are city and urban congregations, offering sizeable memberships, attractive edifices, modern parsonages, and pleasant communities. Shall such active, energetic groups of believers continue to be stigmatized by the false misnomer "vacant" churches?

* * *

We Protestants were released from the bane of clericalism and ecclesiasticism when the leaders of the Reformation posited and applied Scripture's teachings concerning Christ and His Church. It behooves us, their spiritual sons and daughters, to be characterized by an equal clarity of thought and exactness of expression as they were. To promote our distinctive theological heritage effectively involves, among other things, saying precisely what we mean, and definitely meaning what we say. When that ideal grips our minds, this phrase "vacant" churches, along with a number of other malapropisms, will disappear from our vocabularies. And good riddance that will be!

The NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMENTARY on the NEW TESTAMENT

An informed and up-to-date commentary in seventeen volumes by leading international scholars undertaken to provide both preacher and layman with an exposition of the New Testament that is thorough and abreast of modern scholarship and at the same time loyal to the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God.

DR. NED B. STONEHOUSE, *General Editor*

Already published:

COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, by Norval Geldenhuys, $6.00

"An elaborate, lucid and usually practical exposition . . . treated in such a fashion that the reader feels he is in the presence of matters of supreme importance for mankind." —*Princeton Seminary Bulletin*

THE BOOK OF THE ACTS, by F. F. Bruce, $6.00

"It is in my opinion the best major commentary on Acts that has appeared in the last fifty years. It is a pleasure to recommend to pastors and Bible students generally that they add this book to their libraries."
—Dr. Henry E. Turlington,
Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS, by F. W. Grosheide, $5.00

"A commentary of genuine worth." —*The Review and Expositor*

ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA by H. N. Ridderbos, $3.50

"This is an excellent commentary. In scholarship, in theological grasp of the apostle's argument, and in expository power, it need not fear comparison with the masterpieces of exegesis which this epistle has called forth in days gone by." —*The Evangelical Quarterly*

COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLES OF JAMES AND JOHN by Alexander Ross, $3.50

"Dr. Ross is familiar with the latest in critical research (and) has provided a commentary of value for both minister and layman."
—Dr. James C. Barry, *Editor, Baptist Sunday School Board*

COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLES TO THE PHILIPPIANS AND PHILEMON, by Jac. J. Muller, $3.50. *Just released.*

" . . . may well rank as one of the significant achievements of conservative biblical scholarship in this mid-twentieth century."
— Interpretation

PLEASE ORDER THESE VOLUMES FROM YOUR FAVORITE BOOKSELLER